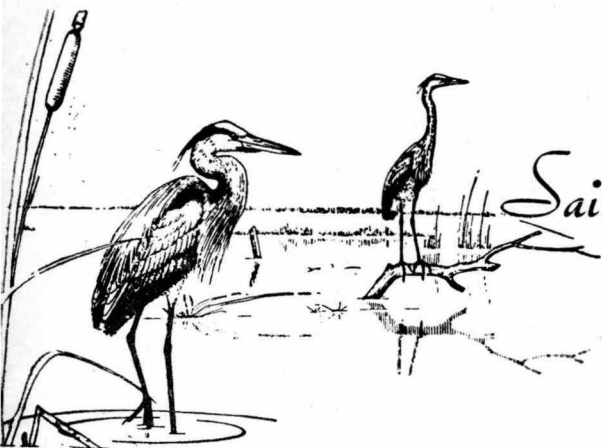




Saint Louis Audubon

Bulletin

January, 1958

Vol. 26, No. 2

Screen Tour Program for Monday, January 27th.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLES

Emerson Scott is an experienced outdoors man and also an especially talented wildlife photographer.

In his boyhood Mr. Scott lived on a farm near Caro, Michigan. His travels have taken him over much of the globe, but Caro is still his home. He attended George Williams College in Chicago and later worked for the YMCA, taking time out to make two trips to Alaska.

During the second World War Mr. Scott was an Army sergeant fighting in the European campaigns. After he was wounded in Italy and hospitalized for eight months, he worked for the American Red Cross. Later he served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Michigan's Veterans' Trust Fund. He is a member of the Adventurers' Club of Chicago, the International Platform Association and the Photographic Society of America.

High in the rugged peaks of Colorado and among the short-grass foothills are to be found some of nature's most colorful phenomena.

Bighorn sheep with their lambs graze flower-carpeted slopes and jump the rim-rocks. Sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens strut and dance a ritual all their own. Herds of lordly elk feed on the velvet green of a valley floor and drink from trout-filled streams.

Among the many rambles there are two especially outstanding: one, a visit to Sand Dune National Monument—a portrayal of shifting sand and shadows that ranks as a work of art; the other, an exciting trek in huge flexible boats down the rapids and deep quiet stretches of the Yampa River in Dinosaur National Monument. This area was saved from flooding by vigilant conservationists who opposed the proposed dam.

Ptarmigan and dusky grouse with chicks, songbirds of many varieties, brilliant wild flowers of the alpine tundra, prairie dogs, bison and antelope . . . the living color that is unforgettable Colorado . . . all captured in film to provide a stimulating experience of arm-chair adventure, an effortless way of rambling up and down mountains to one's heart's content!

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

by O. C. K. Hutchison

Part of the fun and thrill of bird-watching is to find the unusual. Frequently these "finds" are birds which are unusual to the area, either because of time or place. Summer residents showing up late in the fall or winter, bring a "report." The first robin coming back in the spring is always a thrill, even tho a flock of northern robins have been feeding on berries along the creeks and sloughs all winter.

Bird counts taken during Christmas week show a variety of strays, who for some untold reason got left behind when the rest of his clan held their usual fall festival and voted unanimously to head south. A brown thrasher is found taking a bath in an unfrozen pool along a creek bed. A great blue heron looks for an open fishing hole, and a killdeer flies over, signalling his identity by his oft-repeated call. Or perhaps a resident from the far north drifts in; a great white snowy owl, or a snow bunting. Frosty days soon bring in reports that the junco clans have arrived in force and taken over the hedge-rows and country roadsides. Ice drifts into the river from the creeks and brings down a harvest of frozen fish. Bald eagles from the south and west, and gulls from the gulf soon appear to partake.

So too, the spring migrations start with the northbound trips of ducks and geese, the plovers and sandpipers, followed in turn by waves of the warmer weather species. Bobolinks and scarlet tanagers drift thru, headed for meadows and pine woods further north.

So goes the never ending procession, a delight of interest and beauty, or a profound study if you would seek an explanation of the mysteries of migration and the directional control by which birds make their flights over great distances.

Another "unusual" to focus interest and attention is a bird whose appearance is, or appears to be unusual. Barn owls are fairly common in this area, but their habit of hunting only at night, together with their queer "monkey face," is a sure source of questioning when found by one unaccustomed to their appearance. Albinism, which changes the control of normal pigment

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colors in the skin or feathers, results in a robin having a white breast; or a group of albino sparrows which Dr. Wanamaker is watching on the campus at Principia; tan brown wings, the rest of the body a dusty white.

During fall migrations, starlings and blackbirds flock together in very large numbers. But when the time comes to head south the majority of the starlings drop out and stay over winter roosting on buildings, etc. Great flocks of them roost on both of our bridges.

For the past week a "queer" visitor has been frequenting our yard and feeding station here on Prospect street. Crossing of the species is unusual in the bird world, but this little fellow has the markings and habits which suggest both starling and blackbird or grackle. It has a long bill, a short chunky body, a short tail. It "waddles" when it walks, and the flight is rapid but heavy. All of these would suggest starling. It has bright yellow eyes iridescent purple head, neck and breast, and a dark bill. These are grackle markings. Unlike either starling or grackle, it nestles to the ground apparently trying to hide in the leaves. When our tree-tops are filled with flocks of starlings and blackbirds, this little bird hides in the leaves on the ground. He seems to be an outcast.

COME OUT FOR THE NEXT FIELD TRIP

The next Audubon Field trip will take place on Saturday, January 18. Participants will meet at the main gate of the Arboretum, Gray's Summit, promptly at 8 a.m. We hope more of our members will take advantage of these occasions as they have proven most enjoyable. Experienced leaders will help make the trip interesting.

TEACHERS REGISTRATION

Registrations are now being taken for the Harris Teachers College Ornithology course which will begin Tuesday, February 11. This course is open to teachers only.

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BIRD IDENTIFICATION BY SONG

by Gene Wilhelm, Jr.

The greatest majority of bird watchers identify their feathered friends by sight. Today, the amateur and professional birder alike can quickly page through excellent field guides and identify a species with considerable certainty by means of colored plates or line drawings. Such guides emphasize how birds look at a distance, close at hand, or even when in flight.

There is, however, a second form of bird identification that is recognized by the birding realm as being the highest stage of bird identification: identification by song. In this stage, the observer acquires a practical knowledge of bird songs. The birder learns not only those of the brown thrasher and chipping sparrow, but also those of the many migrants that hurriedly pass through our region in the spring and fall. This latter statement seems impossible to the beginner, especially when he is always forgetting bird songs and must re-memorize the songs the following spring.

As in the case of field identification, bird songs can be learned by several ways. The most helpful of all is to associate with someone who knows bird songs. Personal contact is the richest asset any observer can hope to find, and by getting into the field with experienced and sympathetic companions the observer is able to receive and recognize several shortcuts in song identification. A close parallel to the first method is for the birder to get out into the field on his own and learn the hard way. Although this manner is a difficult one, most observers do not realize that the learning of songs depends on more than a good companion. Birds sing in many frequencies and to few ears does the bird sound exactly alike. That is the reason why field guides are at a loss to a great extent in describing bird songs, although the reader does receive some idea of how a song should sound. Thus, it is always advisable to take several notes on particular songs, even though such recordings seem strange at first. However, these are your own personal impressions of what a song sounds like, so do not give them up.

There are other hints that are helpful in learning bird songs, and the many bird record albums put out by the Stillwells of Arkansas and Cornell University cannot be over-emphasized. The recordings reproduce many different species, several of them difficult to hear any time of the year, which, in spite of many difficulties, were actually recorded in the field by means of unique recording equipment. Another short cut to bird song identification would be to read and study the many guides on bird songs.

Songs are best learned by comparing the song of one species with the song of another, and then fixing in the mind a "key" in which particular species are placed mentally in one of several categories. Thus, for example, the loud clear voice of the Carolina wren is immediately associated with the call of the Kentucky warbler. Another example would be a buzzy type song. In this

category the listener could place the golden-winged and blue-winged warblers.

Bird song identification has several advantages over sight identification. If an observer can readily identify a bird by voice he never needs to worry about having a pair of binoculars or a field guide. Of course, this would only be true of a few individuals who are most fortunate in identifying their birds by song. And, too, all observers must resort to binoculars and field guides in the fall when most of the birds are silent. Certainly, though, identification by voice is much quicker and more accurate, since the song either identifies the species or it doesn't. However, the same species of bird might not only have several different songs, but also variations for each individual song. This is particularly true when an observer travels from one locality to another and recognizes variations within the same species.

One asset of song identification should not be overlooked. Often by voice alone, the bird enthusiast is able to identify similar looking species. For example, the distribution ranges of the black-capped and Carolina chickadees meet at St. Louis, and in several localities adjoining the city even overlap in range. The two species look identical in the field, and even in the hand are so similar that they even confuse the expert. The only sure identification is by song. A second example for the St. Louis area would be the case of three Empidonax flycatchers known as the least, alder, and Acadian. All three are colored and marked identically, and although some field guides state each is found in a given habitat, this is "usually" the case and not a sure means of identification. Again, the birder must resort to song identification as the only positive conclusion.

However difficult bird song identification seems to be it is my personal belief that a beginning bird student would learn to identify birds in a shorter time and more accurately by devoting a great amount of time to this phase of bird study. A good accurate test for anyone interested is to go into the field and try to identify the high frequency notes of the golden-crowned kinglet and try to identify the low frequency call of the great horned owl. Any individual who possesses such a wide acuity of ear already has a potential shortcut to bird identification.

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OBSERVATIONS

J. Earl Comfort

The October 26th St. Louis Audubon field trip at Shaw's Garden Arboretum at Gray's Summit was held under advanced winter weather more normal for mid-winter than for the date. A few snow flurries and flocks of high flying geese gave clear indication of approaching winter. Our walk in the wooded section was more pleasant because of the relief from the rough winds. A hermit thrush, robins and myrtle warblers found there probably had the same idea.

The August A. Busch Wildlife Area monthly bird count of November 10th yielded our first long-eared owl of the year on this refuge. Harris sparrows gave indication of wintering. This area probably shelters more wintering mocking birds, cedar waxwings, Harris sparrows and white-crowned sparrows than any other local region. Multiflora rose fences are no doubt the inducement that holds the mockers and waxwings, the rose hips a never ending source of food.

On November 11th I was thrilled by finding six adult evening grosbeaks feeding on ragweed seeds in Calvary Cemetery in the northern section of St. Louis. There were three males and three females. The previous week end gave me a late migrant clay-colored sparrow there. In adjoining Bellefontaine Cemetery wintering pine siskins have again put in an appearance, the attraction the fruit of the sweet gum trees.

Through the untiring efforts of Mrs. Oscar Thalinger in behalf of publicity a radio nature panel was set up at Station KFUE with Rex Conyers as moderator. Other members of the panel are Dick Grossenheider, Earl Hath, Martin Schweig, Gene Wilhelm and Earl Comfort. Consensus of opinion is that credit for the success of the program rightly belongs to Rex. Earl Hath had faithfully filled in on the weekly St. Louis Audubon Conservation Nature program at the studio when necessary before the panel began to function.

On November 16th Alberta Bolinger, Dorothea Vogel, Dave Jones and Earl Comfort were agreeably surprised in Calhoun

County, Illinois when Dorothea spotted a swan on the lake that bears its name. The whistler was an adult bird with the yellow in front of the eye showing up well through our scopes. Swan Lake had its usual large seasonal population of ducks, geese, gulls, coots and cormorants. The duck species numbered 13 with colorful hooded mergansers in far greater than usual numbers, males predominating.

On November 21st Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Wilhelm had our only redpoll listing of the year when one turned up in a flock of siskins and goldfinches in Bellefontaine Cemetery. They also had the first sight of our mellanistic western red-tailed hawk that returns to the cemetery each fall to remain until late spring. We assume the rare hawk is the same individual that turns up regularly since it was first listed there several years ago.

On our St. Louis Audubon field trip at Creve Coeur Lake of November 23rd a good turn out braved the unusually cold early A.M. hours, later to be rewarded by a warming trend under a bright sun. In the P.M. part of the group headed for the Marais Temps Clair marshes. Enroute through St. Louis County we found many fields covered with great flocks of mixed black-birds, grackles, cowbirds and starlings in addition to ring-billed gulls. One of the main attractions was the late fall plowing that turns up myriads of insects and grubs. One field, in particular, had more Brewer's blackbirds than we have seen in a long time. Not so long ago this species was considered rare even in the spring and fall migration. The same applies to the Lapland longspurs we found on an airfield in this county.

The marsh harbored blue and snow geese and ducks by the thousands, the ducks nearly 100 per cent mallards. At sunset we were treated to a great transformation as the sitting ducks became airborne in countless flocks setting out for their night feeding, creating a picture to which no artist could do justice as the birds flew into the rosy sunset glow. The upper air was also full of large Vs of ducks, apparently setting out on a migration or setting in from one as they were all headed down the Mississippi River. We decided the treat was well worth a tardy return to late suppers.

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MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

Board member and long time Audubon enthusiast, Elizabeth Golterman, is one of 10 St. Louis women soon to be signally honored. She is one of those chosen by the Globe-Democrat for having made outstanding contributions to the community.

As head of the Audio Visual Division of the Board of Education, Miss Golterman performs a service well known by all Audubon members and is well deserving of the honor that will be conferred upon her on January 21.

Missouri Naturalist, George E. Moore, of Rockwoods Reservation, retired January 1 after a long period of service with the Missouri Conservation Commission. Mr. Moore who attended the University of Missouri became naturalist at Meramec State Park in 1940 and has worked for the Conservation Commission since 1943. He conducted many field trips for organizations visiting Rockwoods, lectured on conservation before schools and civic groups and did conservation work in summer camps. In 1951 he received the Conservation citation of the St. Louis Audubon Society.

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